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Winthrop's New Track to be Named for Philanthropist Track Buff Irwin Belk

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Winthrop's New Track to be Named for Philanthropist Track Buff Irwin Belk

Quick Facts

- The track will be officially dedicated on Oct. 13 prior to the men's soccer game against Southern Virginia.
- Winthrop's lighted track has eight-lanes on the 400-meter oval which encircles a soccer practice area, as well as event areas for the discus, hammer, dual runways for the long jump, triple jump, high jump and pole vault.

ROCK HILL, S.C. - Winthrop University's new outdoor track will bear the name of **Charlotte businessman Irwin "Ike" Belk** when it opens later this week.

Belk has been a generous contributor to Winthrop University and because of his love for track, Winthrop officials have decided to name the facility the **Irwin Belk Track**. The track will be officially dedicated on **Oct. 13** prior to the men's soccer game against Southern Virginia.

The **8,500-square-yard outdoor track**, completed this summer by **Farley Construction Company**, is located on Winthrop Garnet Drive near the golf course. The project provides Winthrop an NCAA Division I competition track with its **Mondo Super-X Performance surface**, the same surface used in the past eight Olympic Games and 10 World Championships.

Winthrop's lighted track has eight-lanes on the 400-meter oval which encircles a soccer practice area, as well as event areas for the discus, hammer, dual runways for the long jump, triple jump, high jump and pole vault.

The track is being named in honor of North Carolina philanthropist **Irwin Belk**, president of the Belk Group Inc. and retired president of the Belk Group Stores. The former N.C. senator and member of the House of Representatives has been a member of the U.S. Olympic Committee for more than 30 years and was a U.S. delegate at the 54th United Nations General Assembly. A track enthusiast who competed at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Belk has given back to the sport significantly over the years. In addition to serving on many boards of institutions of higher learning, he also endowed many colleges and universities with athletic field houses, competition track facilities, university buildings and funded athletic programs and student scholarships. USA Track & Field honored him in 2004 with its top Pacesetter Award for his philanthropy and service, including building 28 tracks throughout the country.

"The Belk family has been consistently supportive of Winthrop University's endeavors, and I appreciate how Ike Belk has turned his passion for track back into helping young athletes to be as successful as possible," said Anthony DiGiorgio, president of Winthrop University.

Tom Hickman, Winthrop athletics director, said the new facility will be counted among the top outdoor tracks in South Carolina and is sure to attract major competitions to the university.

"In addition to hosting a couple of college meets every year, we're hoping to attract the Special Olympics and even some high school state meets," he noted.

The track is part of the Winthrop University Track and Soccer Complex, a \$2.8 million dual-purpose facility that includes locker rooms, team meeting and storage rooms, public restrooms and concession areas, press box facilities that overlook both competition areas, and an athletic training room. A new scoreboard soon will be added.

Winthrop's track and field program began competition in the 1993-94 season and since then has held practices and competitions at local middle schools. Hickman said the new facility and competition track have already proven a boon to recruiting. "This year's class is probably the best we've ever had," he said.

Head Coach Ben Paxton has been Winthrop's track and field coach since the program's inception. He was named the Big South cross country Coach of the Year in 2000 and 2001 after back-to-back titles for the Eagles. He was also named the outdoor track Coach of the Year in 1999 and 2004 and indoor track Coach of the Year in 2000.

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